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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DOS review(s) completed.

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(Information as of 0800 EDT)

19 Sept 63

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THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(Information as of 0800 EDT)

SUMMARY

There have been no major new developments in the South Vietnamese situation in the past 48 hours.

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The CIA Station in Saigon concurs with General Krulak's findings that the political crisis has had limited adverse effect on the military effort, and that without any change in "management" insurgency can probably be gradually reduced to a point where it can be handled by South Vietnamese forces without massive US help.

The Station notes, however, that an early and clear expression of US policy would avoid a continuation of the existing tensions and uncertainties which could begin to have a cumulative adverse effect on the war effort.

Except for the remaining possibilities of a junior officer coup or a spontaneous explosion of student and urban disaffection, the Station feels, South Vietnam is returning to "normalcy" faster than expected. At the present point, most of the military would welcome Nhu's removal, but few officers would risk action to bring it about unless provoked by an effort on his part to seek accommodation with Hanoi, and then only if they feel assured of US acquiescence and a reasonable chance of success.

The US Consul in Hue reports that the situation there is normal, with heavy police guards on pagodas and schools. There is widespread public disaffection, but Buddhist, faculty and student leaders have

been kept in check by arrests and intimidation, and threatened demonstrations have not taken place. He estimates 150 to 200 still under arrest.

Student leaders claim a committee has been formed, free of Viet Cong influence, to coordinate antiregime activities.

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There has been no recent significant military activity.

I. ASSESSMENTS

1. The CIA Station in Saigon, commenting on the findings of General Krulak, concurs in his conclusion that the shooting war in South Vietnam is still going ahead well, and that the impact of the political crisis has not been as adverse as might have been expected. It feels that without any change in the Diem regime the present military effort can achieve the gradual reduction of insurgency to a point where South Vietnamese forces can handle the remaining Viet Cong activity without massive US support.

a) The Station adds, however, that the continuation for an extended period of the present tensions and uncertainties could begin to have a cumulative adverse effect on the execution of the war effort, and accordingly feels that an early and clear indication of US policy is essential.

b) The Station concurs in the conclusion that discipline in the Vietnamese military establishment remains good. The armed forces could, however break into contending factions polarized around loyalties to individual officer-leaders if Diem should leave the scene or if his "father image" becomes seriously blotted, or in the event that there is any serious disruption of the regime's careful effort to maintain checks and balances of individual authority and prestige among the generals.

c) US-Vietnamese military working relationships will probably become more formal as Vietnamese officers show concern that close ties with Americans may expose them to reprisals by the regime. The Station concurs with the finding that most of the military would hail Nhu's removal, but adds the caveat that few officers would take action to bring it about unless they are convinced that Nhu is moving toward an accommodation with North Vietnam, that they have reasonable assurance of success, and that the US would not oppose a coup.

d) The Station's impression is that the general situation is returning to "normalcy" faster than might have been expected, except for the remaining possibilities of a junior officer coup or some major outburst of the disaffection of students and other key urban groups.

2. The Consul in Hue reports that traffic and business are normal, with a few troops and some concertina wire still in evidence. Police have the principal pagodas, both of which have been closed since 21 August, under continuous surveillance, and keep heavy deployments around schools during school hours. Threatened student demonstrations have not taken place.

The Consul observes that the leadership of the Buddhists, faculties, and students has been rendered ineffective by arrests and intimidation, so that the population, while in large part disaffected, now amounts to a "frightened headless monster." He estimates that out of about 1,000 arrested since the proclamation of martial law, 150 to 200 are still under arrest, and considers it very possible that 20 to 30 Buddhists were killed in the raid on the Tu Dam pagoda.

II. THE REGIME

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2. Mme. Nhu said in Belgrade yesterday that her scheduled speeches in Europe and the United States to defend the South Vietnamese regime must take priority over campaigning for reelection in next week's National Assembly elections in South Vietnam. "No one can replace me" on the lecture assignment, she said, expressing confidence that even in her absence the Vietnamese women were well organized "to get good results for me."

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4. Increasing Vietnamese government harassment of USIS operations in central Vietnam, with a resultant cutback in field travel, is reported by USIS Saigon. Several teams have been followed and some threatened by secret police on leaving their town bases. There have also been reports of unfriendly attitudes toward USIS field representatives by local officials in the delta, although there is less evidence of direct harassment in that area.

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USIS observers feel that there is in fact widespread awareness of the Buddhist crisis in rural areas. Their consensus is that the people listen to but do not believe government radio propaganda, relying instead on VOA and the "bamboo telegraph."

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III. THE OPPOSITION

1. Antiregime plotting by student and other civilian groups apparently continues. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] a committee has been formed to coordinate antigovernment activity among the various student groups. Students have been ordered to contact junior officers and noncommissioned officers in the Vietnamese armed forces to seek military support.

Whereas students tended to be apolitical before the attack on the pagodas on 21 August, 90 percent of the student body now supports the antigovernment movement. The students have selected leaders who are strongly opposed to the Viet Cong, and believe that the Viet Cong have had no influence in student actions.

Many students have fled Saigon to avoid arrest and to organize antigovernment activity in the provinces. They now plan to stage more demonstrations in cities of the delta and in central Vietnam.

2. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] reports the formation of a new clandestine political organization, the United Front (UF), dedicated to the overthrow of the Diem regime.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

to include businessmen, intellectuals, civil servants, and members of the Buddhist Student Association. The UF plans to issue a manifesto next week which will be strongly anti-Communist and antiregime. The manifesto probably will also accuse Ngo Dinh Nhu of preparing negotiations with North Vietnam.

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IV. MILITARY SITUATION

There has been no significant military activity reported in the past 24 hours.

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V. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

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25X1 was officially informed by Ngo Dinh Nhu last week
that South Vietnam's main dispute with the US is
over US insistence on large-scale military opera-
tions in South Vietnam. Nhu also said that the
Vietnamese government is considering the "General
de Gaulle offer."

25X1 [] was told that the Diem
government intends to relax pressures and allow the
Buddhists more freedom of action. Nhu was confi-
dent that the misunderstanding with the Buddhists
could be easily corrected and a mutually satisfactory
solution found.

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ANNEX

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY MEMORANDUM:

Repression by the Diem Government

1. The government's recent crackdown on Buddhist pagodas in major cities and widespread arrests of students are current examples of the Diem regime's repressive tactics. While such tactics are regrettable and undercut the war effort against the Viet Cong, they are not untypical of repressive tactics practiced by many Asian governments.* In the case of the GVN, other examples of its repressive tactics down through the years may be summarized as follows:

2. The broadest form of repression in South Vietnam, and the one which has most alienated the country's small educated elite, is the blanket suppression of criticism of the regime and the prohibition of any organized opposition activity. Any organized activity, even by a small group, requires a permit. Authorization is systematically denied to all groups not supporting the regime or which do not permit the regime to control and monitor their activities. By this device political movements other than those favorable to the regime have been suppressed. Individuals or members of groups openly criticizing the government are frequently detained and questioned and sometimes jailed.

*Repression is manifest in Burma where the Ne Win military oligarchy has suspended the constitution. Duly elected officials, including deposed Prime Minister U Nu, have been jailed since the 1 March 1962 coup. Repression is also evident in the actions of South Korea's presently ruling military junta. In Thailand Sarit's military oligarchy is more benign, but democratic practices here are also ignored. Prince Sihanouk in Cambodia brooks no genuine opposition, and on occasion has resorted to strongarm measures and summary arrests to reinforce his authority. He has, however, handled student protests with tact rather than force, and remains a genuinely popular leader. In Indonesia, where "guided democracy" holds sway, numerous opposition parties have been banned.

3. The suppression of private criticism, even by persons within the regime, is more subtle, but has operated to alienate many talented persons who originally supported the regime. The method of control has in part been the semi-clandestine Can Lao organization, whose loyal members are favored in jobs and promotions in the civil service and military. Can Lao members maintain a network of surveillance on the attitudes of their colleagues. It has also been a noted fact of life in South Vietnam that officials showing independence of thought are shunted aside from positions of responsibility in favor of regime favorites.

4. The government maintains an extensive system of political detention camps, known as reeducation centers. The current population of these camps is not fully known, but numbers well in the thousands. Many inmates, of course, are Viet Cong sympathizers or agents, but many others are not.

5. The country's judicial branch operates as an extension of the executive. A system of military courts, which allows Viet Cong prisoners to be tried locally, also includes a permanent military tribunal with power to apply the death sentence for political subversion. Death sentences by the court, however, have not yet been carried out. (It is significant to note that since the 1960 coup attempt, not one execution is known to have been carried out, although some coup leaders still at large have been sentenced to death in absentia.) There is no observance of habeas corpus, and suspected opponents of the regime are often imprisoned for long periods without trial, or even without formal charges.

6. Despite the trappings of free national elections, election regulations are designed to ensure the victory of government-picked candidates.

7. De facto press censorship has long been imposed. On several occasions, and most recently in the case of the Saigon newspaper Tu Do this month, local newspapers have been summarily closed down and their offices and equipment smashed by police.

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8. We have insufficient hard evidence to prove or disprove Buddhist charges of repression by the government prior to 8 May 1963. Between 8 May and 20-21 August there were numerous eye-witness reports of police brutality against Buddhist demonstrators, although most demonstrations were not interfered with. There were also reliable reports of night arrests, and isolated beatings and killings. Beating of political prisoners has frequently been reported in the past.

9. Since 20-21 August, use of force against students has been widely publicized, along with arrests, but casualties have remained few. There is less reliable information on political arrests, but reports of some arrests of prominent individuals have been received through credible sources.

10. On a more general scale, there have long been reports of abuse of the populace by local civilian officials and military troops. Some of these are being corrected. However, abuses which were prevalent in the government's agrovillage resettlement program of 1959-60, such as instances of peasant forced labor and extortion, are reported to persist in some areas of the strategic hamlet program.

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